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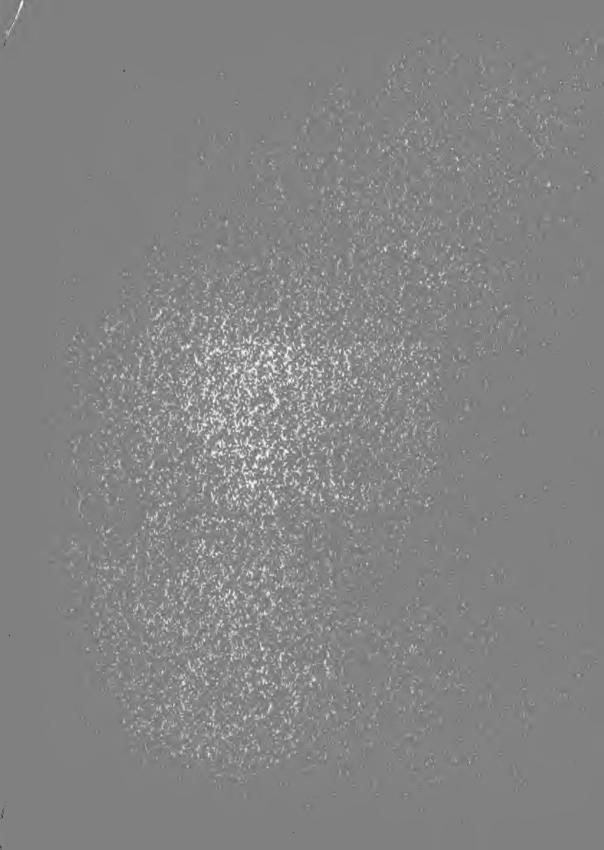


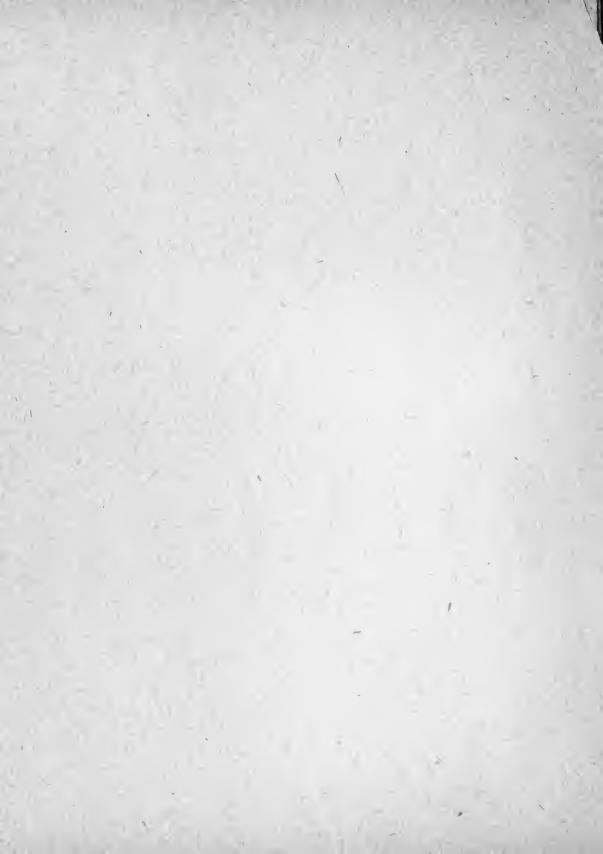
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.













ALMETTA.

BY D. T. PRAIGG.

INDIANAPOLIS, IND.:
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1894.





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BY THE AUTHOR.



A home palatial, where the daily board

Beneath Abundance groaned, and where no good

Or needed thing was wanting; it was stored

With Plenty, e'en to repletion, nor could

The heart find in it aught that was ignored,

Which was to Comfort or to Pleasure due,

Or e'en suggest the thought of something new.

It stood within a grove of forest trees,

Whose boughs were by the rays of morning sun

First kissed; whose shades were like the cooling breeze,

Which from the sea by Nature's art is won;

Flowers of rarest beauty, the eye to please,

In richest fragrance bloomed, nor sought to shun Admiring gaze, and fountains on the lawn Unceasing played from dawn to coming dawn.

It was the home of Peace and Joy, a place

To which grim Want a stranger was; where Pain
And Disappointment ne'er had shown their face,

Nor gentle Hope had e'er been known to wane;
A home in which Contentment had kept pace

And hand-in-hand with Duty gone; where bane
Of life, Deceit, Distrust, Dissension, Guile,
Had entered not its precincts to defile.

The waters of a stream the base did lave

Of hill on which the Home was resting;

And to the scene the voice of rippling wave

Did lend enchantment, as if attesting

To absence from its bounds of thought that gave

One pang to the joys that there were nesting;

As if its inspiration nature 'd caught

And come to it with richest blessings fraught.

About it stood the homes of modest mein

Where sought the artisans their nightly rest;

The homes where Toil's deep furrows could be seen

And where the joys were few whose coming bless'd

The care-worn heart; where standing gaunt and lean

The wolf did haunt the door, unwelcome guest.

There the mansion stood, reared its head on high,

Like feudal lord among his peasantry.

Upon the lawn, engaged in childish play,

Two children were, a boy just merging on

His teens, a girl three years his junior; they

Did run and leap and laugh the paths along,

Did take each other's "tag" and far away

Did skip and dodge behind the trees upon

The velvet sward; to them life was a lot

Which nothing knew of plot and counterplot.

The boy an heir was to the large estate

Of which the mansion was a part; he knew

Naught of Discomfort or the ills that wait

On Poverty; 'mid rare delights he grew

From year to year, nor sought nor shunned the fate

Which on his path did choicest blessings strew.

To him each day was like recurring joy

Whose pleasures would alone the time employ.

The girl was humbler born; her childish feet

Were doomed to walk in paths of pain; the seal

Of Poverty was on her home; to meet

The wants of life her parents did appeal

To work each day; by management discreet

They did provide the daily frugal meal;

And of life's comforts having little here

They fixed their gaze upon the future sphere.

She was an only daughter and her weal

Was prized above their lives; she was taught In all things to be candid and to deal

Not in Deception which with pain is fraught;

Nor to disguise her nature and conceal

Those generous emotions which, when caught
At their full tide, so many blessings bring
And prove of human joy the parent spring.

Hard by the mansion stood the humble place

She called a home; and comfortless did seem,

In contrast with the massy pile whose grace

And elegance surpassed her brightest dream;

But childhood is content to run its race

Nor look beyond the day for brighter beam
Than with the present comes; she envied not
What might appear her playmate's better lot.

Upon the lawn they played, guileless and free,
Children of nature, free from want or care;
Types of that joy which in eternity
Exists for those who for it here prepare.
"Suffer the little ones to come to me",
The Master said; "theirs is the kingdom rare
To inherit"; for in such lives we see
A likeness of his matchless purity.

Oh, childhood, childhood! sweet are thy delights,

Sweet are thy charms, dear thy guileless joys;

Whose days, made short by Pleasure, and whose nights

Are long because succeeding day annoys

Thee not with Sorrow's burdens; puts no blights

Upon thy present moment, and alloys

Not with thy ev'ry joy that sense of pain

Which makes the old for childhood yearn again.

Sweet is thy innocence and pure the bliss

Which from it flows thy life to consecrate;

Thou hast not learned the best of life to miss

Or turn 't to doubtful purpose; to berate

All good in others nor, what's worse than this,

To ill requite a kindness, be ingrate

And smite thy benefactor; thou hast learned

All good is to be loved, all bad be spurned.

Bright is the smile which on thy face appears,

Joyous the laugh which o'er thy pathway rings;

Blest are thine eyes which shed not bitter tears

Of anguish from remorse, whose biting stings

With horror fill; thine are as yet the years

Which full of gladness are, and from which springs

No deadly poison, life to permeate,

And fill thy soul, instead of love, with hate.

Oh, childhood, childhood! thou 'rt the time

When Hope and Joy and Peace the bosom fill;

When life responds in trust to ev'ry chime

Of love and tenderness; when there's no ill

Foreboding to thy life, but a sublime,

Unselfish nature makes thy heart to thrill With touching sweetness, which to faith is due, And which we love because 'tis always true.

Thine in life is great and holy mission,

Thine to scatter flowers on ev'ry side;

Thine to gain from Hope its best fruition,

And to a higher purpose be the guide;

Thine it is, though humble thy condition,

To close the door to Hate and open wide

The door to Love; in thy sweet constancy

We see the type of what we all should be.

Thine is implicit faith, a confidence

That clings in love to ev'ry outstretched hand;

A holy trust, upon whose innocence,

There yet remains the pure and heav'nly brand Of God's eternal truth; a sweet incense

Exhaled to earth from altars in that land

Of peace and rest, where Virtue reigns and sings

Eternal anthems to the King of Kings.

Thou dost believe the things that would belief
Stagger in thy elders; thy heart receives
All things as truth, and knows not that the grief,
Most fatal to thy peace, that which deceives
Most cruelly, may often lie beneath

The smile, which we are prone to think relieves;
And from the heart takes ev'ry weight of care
To make of earth an Eden bright and fair.

Oh! that the day would never come when child

Would see aught save the glories of the morn;

When it would never know that life 's beguiled

By joys which in the end become forlorn;

And naked stand, like specters grim and wild,

Around the hopes which in our youth are born.

The child 's well on the road to human flaws

When first he loses faith in Santa Claus.

They played upon the lawn; their childish hearts

Of buoyant life were full, from care were free;

For neither knew as yet the cunning arts

Which by Deception 's practiced; they could see

Naught save what on the surface was; the smarts

Which Time lays on his children, were to be

Hidden yet from them; they were yet to know

That life is not of joy a constant flow.

The boy was by companions known as Mark,

By others known as Marcus, and the girl

Was called Almetta; he was like the lark,

Inclined to soar on high above the whirl

Of things terrestrial; his was a barque

Whose sails to any gale he dared unfurl;

And e'en in play delighted in its scars

And proved himself well named a son of Mars.

And, yet, he was not bad, though of frolic

Full to overflowing; an only son

And reared in town, the feature bucolic

Was not pronounced; to work he 'd never run

But rather from it in play to rollic,

Though he was fond of sport with dog and gun;

And could as deadly bead on all game draw

As if descended direct from Esau.

He misnamed was not, as some persons are,

Who get cognomen ere their human traits

Are well developed; and which show how far

Their parents missed it when they closed the gates,

Which to other names should be left ajar;

That their children by paying but half rates, In after years, might slip through and remit Some of the tolls they pay for their misfit.

I like to see a happy consonance

Between one's name and dominating trait;
It comes to us like agent in advance

Of life's great circus which, impatient wait
We for; a pity 'tis to have romance

Only in name when life 's a barren state.

Mark's name was not, as some are, misnomer,
For among the stars he proved a roamer.

I hate to see a "Lily" growing up

With the complexion of a dark brunette;

And one who 's fairer drinking from the cup

Of gall by being misnamed "Violet".

I hate to see a big Newfoundland pup,

Or horse or cow called by the name of "Pet".

I hate to see a woman full six feet

Bearing the little name of "Margarite".

I never thought the gentle name of "Pearl"

Applied just right to woman coarse and strong,

However well it fit the little girl,

While yet her heart was full of playful song.

I never thought the title of the "Earl"

Sat well on him who always was in wrong,

And never cared the right to know; "Myra"

Is misfit when full of fun her eyes are.

I'd like to see a modern Susannah

Who'd scorn the name of "Susie"; a Mary Jane

Who would not be a "Mamie"; a Hannah,

Whose name to her was precious, who'd disdain

to exchange for the name of "Anna";

I'd like to see a modern Sarah reign

As Sarah, not as "Sallie"; Margaret

Not as "Madge", and Annie not as "Annette"...

These good old names are sadly out of date,

When "Carrie" takes the place of Caroline;

When Catherine becomes a modern "Kate"

Or "Kittie"; "Emma" supplants Emeline,

Because, forsooth, the latter's thought sedate;

Elizabeth no longer is divine

But is lost in "Lizzie", and I fancy

All modern girls are ashamed of "Nancy".

If all the Pauls, who never will be Pauls,

Were working in the vineyard of the Lord;

And ev'ry Moses should respond to calls

To lead the host from Egypt's fierce discord;

And all the Daniels sat in Judgment halls

And judged themselves by God's eternal Word;

Were Noahs "comforts", Patricks "patricians",

We'd have on earth heaven's blest fruitions.

If ev'ry one who's dubbed a Benedict

Was "blessed"; Ebenezers "stones of help" were;

All John's the "gifts of God", nor derelict

In duty; Enochs "consecrated" here;

All Clements so "mild tempered" they'd not pick

A quarrel; each Hilary "full of cheer",

And every Clarence "illustrious",

It would save the world from many a muss.

But ev'ry Robert is not "bright in fame",

Nor has ev'ry Phineas "mouth of brass";

Though many Peters are but "rocks" in name,

Though they are often found at early mass;

James too often is "supplanter"; the same

Is true of George, a "landholder"; alas!

Henry 's the "head of a house" and fact is

Would have the landlord pay all the taxes.

But I 'm not one to go back on the saints

Because their names are misplaced here below;

No doubt, that when alive they felt restraints

And had to name their children so and so;

Perhaps as we do now, and heard complaints

When Ephraims did too "very fruitful" grow.

But these complaints are not 'gainst fruitage now

But 'gainst the barrenness of parent bow.

But pardon this digression, let 's retrace

Our steps to Mark and to Almetta who

Upon the lawn were playing; upon her face

There was a ruddy glow of health which few,

Even at her age, could boast of; and grace

And ease her ev'ry movement marked; she grew

From day to day much like neglected flow'r

Which blooms alone from its inherent pow'r.

Her eyes were dark and in their tender gaze

A wealth of joy and sweetness could be seen;

And when, in sudden mirth, the lids she 'd raise,

As though astonished or surprised she 'd been,

One could detect within her soul the rays

Of childish beauty and of graceful mein

At focus; there her life did concentrate

To be thrown out in richest hues ornate.

Her hair in golden ringlets fell around

A face and neck, as perfect in their form,

As nature's choicest model; if all ground

Were run through finest sieve 'till it was warm With life, and then, that dross should not abound,

'Twere purified by nature's fiercest storm, It would suffice not still, for mother earth Ne'er cradled in her bosom fairer birth.

In disposition she was gentle, mild,

Open and generous, and like the sun, When it returns to morning undefiled

By darkness of the night its race to run, Her presence lent a joy that constant smiled,

And for her home a wealth of gladness won;

Made light the burden of her parents' care.

Which else their toil had grievous made to bear.

In the public school, that equalizer

Of all degrees, where stands each tub alone

On its own bottom; where social ties are

Based not on wealth nor on affected tone,

Nor on assumption of being wiser

Than others are; for on the school playground

Distinctions snobbish are but seldom found.

'Twas in this school, the cradle in our land,

Where's rocked the genius born in low estate

Into a higher being; where the hand

Of robust training grasps the pow'r innate,

And leads it on till it alone can stand

Against the buffetings of time and fate,

That Mark and Almetta learned each other

To love; she as sister, he as brother.

But from the public schools their paths diverged

When Mark away from home to college went;

And from it in a few years he emerged,

And studied a profession, with intent

To practice in his native city; urged

On by friends, though it was his nat'ral bent, He forged ahead, found favor in each eye, And learned that friends will friends oft multiply.

But he was not the bright and open child

He was when first we knew him, for he'd been

Led into paths of evil by the wild

And reckless youths at college, and had seen
The darker side of life, though not defiled

As some have been by habits like; I mean
He did not smoke nor chew nor drink nor swear,
But I'm afraid his virtues ended there.

And took high rank in his profession;

He attended church and was circumspect
In discharge of duty; made concession
In public to no wrong; knew ev'ry sect,
And dogmas could discuss from confession
To final perseverance of the saints,
And, yet, he was not free from moral taints.

Though some excuse we'll find for him, perhaps,

In his profession, which is noted for

The many people it lays out and wraps

In the gloomy shroud; he was a doctor,

And his profession one that often saps

Foundations of the sympathies; like war,

Dissecting rooms oft turn men's hearts to stones

And they come from the course well named, "Sawbones".

A pity 'tis that the art of healing

Must needs be learned by chopping up the dead;

That the heart against its better feeling

Must be steeled when to this profession 's wed The man; lest it is the art of stealing

The corpse by night away from narrow bed, Would ne'er be perfect if the men who did Were too refined to tear off coffin lid.

I did not say that Mark had played the ghoul,

Nor did I, mind you, even intimate

That he had made of himself such a fool,

When he could buy a corpse at half the rate

'Twould cost to steal it; and, besides, a rule

Has been observed in colleges of late

Not "meds" but others to incite to steal;

And this, 'tis said, great progress does reveal.

Perhaps it does; I do not criticise

Men and methods, but simply tell the tale

As it was told to me; I 'd not advise

A friend of mine, when it would naught avail,

To indulge in fiction, nor yet surmise

That this or that or 'tother does prevail.

For my part, I confess that when I 'm sick

I 'd have the doctor come at double quick.

The reason why I never criticise

Is because all critics are dyspeptic;

For that, in fact, is what the term implies,

And I would, by odds, be antiseptic;

Or hide the dose in sugar-coat's disguise

Like the Homeopath or, like Eclectic,

From all the schools the great cureall art take

And depend at last on pills cathartic.

But another reason that should impel

To silence when a doctor is discussed,

Lies in the fact that mortal to sick spell

Is liable, no matter how robust

His constitution; and 'tis always well

Not to inspire the man with deep disgust,

Whose medicine you may be forced to take,

When he, not you, the compounds all will make.

In the meantime Almetta passed from grade

To grade, and at length the course completed;

And though she longed the classics to invade

And get the lore, which to us escheated,

From ages past, her circumstances made

The thing not to be hoped for; deep seated

Was her regret, but now she sought to find

At home a higher culture for her mind.

For her ambition still was to excel

In all the things that useful can be made;

And to this end such things she did repel

As would distract attention, which she paid

To higher duties; thus her time was well

Divided between household duties laid

Upon her, and the studies which to her

Did lead the mind to fields of knowledge dear.

A willing hand she lent to ev'ry task,

And learned to sew, to knit, to sweep, to cook;

Anticipated, ere her mother'd ask,

The wish that this or that be done; with look Of cheerfulness, that did the heart unmask,

She to each call responded; to her book, When duty was discharged, she would return And late at night the oil of study burn.

This self-allotted study was the source

Of pleasure and of profit, and ere long

Increased the powers of a mind whose force

Had always been in quick perception strong;

And yielded pleasure in its daily course,

That filled her life with that responsive song, Which comes from knowledge that, all duty done, The smiles of others on her life had won.

Her home, made tidy by her constant care,

Presented a picture so clean and neat,

That the very gods might assemble there

And have no dust to shake from off their feet

When they departed; hers were talents rare

In domicile, for over all a sweet

And genial air was thrown, so majestic

She might be called a queen yet domestic.

Improvement of the mind kept steady pace

With lapse of time, and Virtue, too, I ween,

Went hand in hand with Duty in the race

With Hope and Joy and Peace; at seventeen

She was a picture of ideal grace

And beauty, and might aspire as queen Of hearts to reign, were not the love of hearts Made trade and traffic of in worldly marts.

Her home, though humble, by her hand was made

Fit dwelling place for Virtue and for Love;

A place, though poor her parents, where no shade

Of Sorrow lingered; but o'er which the dove

Of gentle Peace did hover; where no staid

And haughty Ceremonial did shove

Aside the simple joys with ruthless hand,

And still the voice of Mirth with harsh command.

In her the parents found that rare delight

Which to the humble home by heav'n is sent,

When after years of toil parental sight

Beholds a womanhood on which were bent

The hopes of earlier years; to her bright

And sympathetic nature there was lent

A tender love, the humble home to grace,

And make of it Content's abiding-place.

She was to them what God has well ordained

That children to their parents all should prove;
A stay and comfort, when their feet well trained,

In paths of filial love and duty move;
Hers was a heart that love of all hearts gained,

So gently moved all things in family groove;
And like the early Christians they did eat
In joy and singleness of heart their meat.

Sweet are the flowers that bloom in Virtue's path,

Tender the songs that come from Virtue's heart;

Gentle are the zephyrs that sweetly waft

The fragrant incense which her smiles impart;

Bright are her loving eyes, deep they engraft

Upon the soul that better, nobler part

Of man and woman, whose divine-like lives

Intensify the joys of husbands, wives.

Pure is the joy that 's born of virt'ous worth,

And truly great the modest woman,

Who finds beside her own domestic hearth

Delight enough for the want that 's human;

And in her nobler self would ne'er give birth

To those poor follies, which ev'ry true man

Believes the sense of the sex impeaches,

When, skirts discarded, she dons the breeches.

And limbs exposed to a gaping crowd,

Felt not rebuke for modesty dismayed,

And realized her nature was not cowed?

Nor felt she 'd given no cause to upbraid

Her better self? Oh, woman! see the bowed

Head of thy sister, and take a lesson

From that modest worth all put a bless on.

To be "strong minded" does not imply

That one must wear the apparel of the male;

Or show her limbs, alas, alas, awry!

Or rig her ship for ev'ry foolish gale.

No modest costume will be cut so high

To hide the feet it will not quite avail;

The costume may be new and quite unique

But it marks the wearer a silly freak.

Think of our ladies, gathering at the Fair

Of all the world in eighteen ninety-three,

The great Columbian Exposition, where

The mighty wonders of the land and sea

Were spread before the gaze; and then and there,

In such an august presence with a free

And too easy manner, display to man

The disgusting features of the "Can-can."

God shield our country when our modest maids

Have such example set by those who claim

To have all merit, within certain grades,

To lead the way, with hopes of highest aim,

To better lives; but make unceasing raids

On all that 's strong and manly, and the same,

Forgetting that Virtue 's always discreet,

Display instead of taste their ankles neat.

I 've no objection to a pretty foot,

And surely none to a shapely ankle;

And when, by chance, displayed in well made boot

They give no cause in the heart to rankle;

But modesty will always aim to shoot

Higher than the feet; no heav'nly bank 'll

Ever break because it avoids displays

That appeal alone to the vulgar gaze.

True woman is content to follow out

The purpose designed in her creation;

God made her higher than the men, no doubt,

In moral worth and in queenly station;

But higher excellence she puts to rout,

When she seeks no greater elevation

Than comes with morbid style of dress

That makes of her a very horrid mess.

There is a work a woman well may do

And keep herself unspotted from all fad;

For many hearts would quickly open to

Her love and sympathy, which would make glad

The homes of Want and Toil; and thus imbue

With Hope and Joy the lives that else were sad;

And shed a lustre on her holy name

That would outshine all other worldly fame.

And, yet, I don't believe divine command

To cultivate the Home rests only on

The woman; nor that texts, always at hand,
And constantly some people's lips upon,

Apply alone to her, because of brand

Put on them by the Saints now dead and gone;

For, if women wait, as suggested Paul,

To learn at home, some would not learn at all.

But in the home is where she best may reign,

Where brightest her virtue and beauty shine;

Where loving smiles give quick relief from pain,

And man exalts her to the noble shrine

Where laid his best oblation is; no main

On earth is desolate where divine

And holy light is shed, and where she moves

A wife and mother and the home approves.

And in the home a man's best endeavor

Should be exerted to protect and shield

His God-giv'n treasures; he the lever

Should be to lift all burdens, not to yield

To foibles and to vices, which sever

The ties that else would make the home a field

So bright, so perfect, and so full of cheer,

It would an Eden, ere the Fall, appear.

I like to see a man and woman place

Their shoulders firmly to the fam'ly wheel

Each in proper sphere; he boldy to face

And cope with manly duty, true as steel;

While she o'er home with modesty and grace

Presides; her first great aim to make him feel

At home; such bands, I need hardly mention,

Know not adverse connubial tension.

A woman likes assistance in her work

And so does man, though 't be but word of cheer,
Or glance of sympathy, which says, "I 'll shirk

No duty which will help thee; have no fear
To call upon me". He 's worse than Turk

Or Tartar who sits idly down with sneer
Upon his face, and tries not to invent
A healing balm for fam'ly discontent.

These duties are reciprocal; they are

Due as much from one as from the other;

To ev'ry home they come as brightest star

Of hope; what 's sister's love to brother.

What life would be without a fam'ly jar,

What to child is care of loving mother,

They are to home, dividends paid by love

On bonds whose value's far their face above.

I have seen some women who did, I thought,

Needlessly bear an undue share of pain;

And likewise men, whose lives seemed to be fraught

With bitter tears, because they could not gain

The things in life for which they nobly fought

But got not, though on continual strain;

And when such natures are joined together,

What wonder they break the nuptial tether!

But many whom we may think mismated

Are far from being so; they typify,

In their lives at home a joy that 's rated

By them above the things that mortal eye

In others sees; when the heart is sated

With outward form, concealing purpose sly,

(While arm in arm through social halls they roam),

To fight it out when all alone at home.

Almetta saw the best and brightest side

Of life within the home; for she knew not

That great abundance simply opens wide

The door to strife till more abundance's got;

So in her home content she did abide

Nor look with pain upon her lowly lot;

She felt the noble purpose in her heart

Which seeks to rise, yet feels not envy's smart.

Sweet is the blush that sits on Virtue's cheek;

Enchanting sweet the nectar we may sip,

As devotees we list to hear her speak,

And hang upon the word that from her lip E'er falls to cheer the lowly and the meek,

And take from life the sting of social whip;
Which, obedient to a cringing fear,
Pays court to gold, lets merit disappear.

Sweet is the consolation one may find

In conscious merit, though the world may frown,
And turn an ear that 's deaf, an eye that 's blind,

Upon his better talent; and cry down
His budding genius which, the narrow mind,

Wrapped in its self-sufficient cowl and gown,
Would fain oppress because he does not ask
Its supercilious smile upon his task.

To gain applause, get in the social float

With the narrow minds that lead the fashion;

Be sure to go by rail (too slow 's the boat),

For one must hurry to make a mash on

That kind of stuff; when taken by the throat

'Twill fawn and cringe; if not, lay the lash on.

You 'll get a full reward for all your pains

From those who know not brass from modest brains.

Take, for instance, the modern man of prose,

Or poet, if you please, or otherwise;

Upon the stage he makes his talents pose,

Seeks for applause, looks for admiring eyes;

Gets fame, he thinks, from out the well-filled rows

Of seats, though forced to hear the cat-call guys

Of "gal'ry gods" when on their plane they see

An "author" in burlesque and mimicry.

But that is hardly honest, manly fame

Which comes from pand'ring to a morbid taste;

Nor is an author worthy of the name,

To raise a laugh in others, puts to waste

His precious time without the sense of shame;

Who's ever ready with unseemly haste
To mount the rostrum at poor Folly's call
And be a butt alike for great and small.

God help the man with talents well endowed,

Who has no higher appreciation

Of nature's gifts, than in a giggling crowd

To show them off; and on this foundation

Rear high a silly structure and be proud

Of self-abasement, self-condemnation.

The Author must be sorely off for bread

Who poses thus at fifty cents a head.

The poet, who belittles his own work,

In "recitation" on the public stage;

And mimics, with many a turn and jerk,

The "end-man" who a doubtful war does wage

For bread, may well be likened to a Burke,

With talents to inspire, but who 'd engage

In wrangling with a Wilkes, without an aim

More noble than to get the mob's acclaim.

Think of a Byron, Milton, Shakespeare, Pope,

Putting up their talents for derision;

As though with negro minstrels they did cope

For fame; ask of "end-man" a division

Of the silly plaudits on which his hope

Of bed and board is based; Elysian

Are not the pleasures of the heav'nly muse

When thus her modest worth one does abuse.

But it 's the fashion, it 's the latter-day

Method of getting one's self in the swim;

To hire out, for man's ignoble pay,

The talents which are born in her, or him,

As is the case, and barter off the lay

Of sacred minstrelsy; and at the whim

Of "Literary Bureau" take the train

And fly from place to place for sordid gain.

My gentle, gentle Muse! may God forbid

That I subject thee ever to such shame;

'Twere better that thy talents should be hid

Beneath a bushe!, than thy holy name

Be dragged through literary slums, and mid

The gaping, yawping crowd I thee defame

For filthy gold; ne'er shall it separate

Us two; I'll hold thee pure at any rate.

My gentle, gentle Muse! blest are thy charms

When love and hope and joy thy songs inspire;

Thou soar'st above the things of earth's alarms

And yield'st the fruitage of the heav'nly lyre

Unto my soul, and ev'ry fear' disarms;

And gently lead'st it from the worldly mire

To place where love and purity combine

And there I bow at thy eternal shrine.

My gentle, gentle Muse! be thou to me
In ev'ry lonely hour a genial friend;
Within whose soul the gem of constancy
Resplendent shines; teach me always to bend
My head in presence of thy purity;
From thy blest home of perfect peace descend,
That I may cultivate thy matchless worth
And share the joys to which thou givest birth.

But this digression is longer somewhat

Than I at first designed to make it,

(Though it 's a license ev'ry man has got);

But I confess that when I did o'ertake it,

It came with so much ease into my plot

That I have been very loth to break it;

But I 'll conduct you to another scene

In which our hero meets our heroine.

For you must know there was a social chasm

Between the two since they mature had grown;

And though in youth they knew no such phantasm,

The time had come when Mark felt he must own

Its power; must not cause a nervous spasm

In the fibers social; and they 'd been thrown

Not together, since he came from college,

Somewhat puffed up by his greater knowledge.





Almetta, seated in a park one day, In pensive mood was musing on the scene.

Almetta, seated in a park one day,

In pensive mood was musing on the scene;
A book with well worn pages open lay

Upon her lap, while at her feet the green

And tender grass of springtime, as in play,

Was waving in the breeze; and just between

Her and the western sun a bright rainbow

Painted with radiant tints the fountain's flow.

The month was May, the sweetest of the year,

When nature gives her best and brightest skies;

When flowers bloom upon the sward to cheer

The loving heart; when all the heav'nly dyes

Are seen in nature's freshness, and the ear

Catches first the song of the bird that flies

Back from its winter home on joyful wing,

And heralds with its song return of spring.

4

The month when nature's notes are all in tune;

When gentle zephyrs in their freshness blow

O'er fields of early blossoms; and the moon

Sheds o'er the world her softest light; when grow

In healthy vigor the flowers that on June

Their fragrance and their beauty will bestow;

The month, when lark returned, does sweetly trill

The month that 's cradled, as it were, between

The gusts of April and the calm of June;

Whose mission 'tis to prove a gentle mean

Between these two, and be to us a boon

From nature's hand, which paints in living green,

Her notes in ev'ry vale, on ev'ry hill.

The fields and trees, and puts the brooks in tune For that sweet song begun by cycling years,

When first she threw to space eternal spheres.

The sun was sinking in the western sky,

But seemed to rest a cloud's dark edge upon,
As though 'twould kiss the earth a fond good bye

Ere below the horizon it had gone;
Perhaps, did linger that its rays might lie

Upon the path that Mark was treading on,
To show Almetta in that lovely light

Which would ere long be lost in coming night.

Mark stopped with sudden impulse as he saw

Her form before him, with head reclining

Upon her hand, but dared not nearer draw

Lest he seem her thought to be divining;

To him her face and form had not a flaw,

And to her he felt his heart inclining

In that sentiment which, when born above,

Deserves and bears the gentle name of Love.

But which, when born of passion of the earth,

Is like the earth, full of corroding dross;

And has not will or power to give birth

To best and noblest impulse; but like moss

Which clings to shaded ground, it leads to dearth

Of happiness, and yields to life a cross

And tangled purpose; what it was to him

We 'll learn ere long if we keep in the swim.

Mark gazed as one who 'neath some potent spell,

Bewildered stands, and with his soul entranced
Longs to draw near, but knows a motion 'd tell

Her of his presence, had he but advanced
A step; he stood and gazed nor footfall fell

To startle her whose pensiveness enhanced
Her beauty angelic, and made her seem
The realization of Love's fond dream.

Mark gazed, and o'er his heart there came the spell
Which to us is borne on Memory's wings,
When on the Past's rich joys and hopes we dwell,
And through the heart their gentle echo rings;
Like voice of friend, who in some distant dell
Recalls the song, well nigh forgot, and sings
In notes whose tenderness brings back the years
Whose record stands unmarred by blots and blurs.

A sigh escaped his lips, a shade's deep tinge
Rested for a moment on his brow;
As if he felt some inward fire to singe
The surface of his heart, ne'er felt till now;
When Mem'ry opened wide the door on hinge
Which long unused had been, for him to bow
In presence of a beauty that outshone
The May-day bloom by nature now full-blown.

And well he might upon the picture gaze

With soul enraptured, for 'tis seldom given

To mortal man, while treading earthly ways,

And doomed yet awhile the world to live in,

To rest his eyes on nature all ablaze

With glory majestic, and see heaven

Personified, as it were, in woman

And doubt, and yet know, that she is human.

For she no longer was the child he 'd known
In school or playing with him on the lawn;
Ere in his heart the seeds of pride were sown
And 'tween the two the social line was drawn;
Or he had learned to bow at fashion's throne
And for the patronage of caste to fawn;
To him the vision was so pure, so good,
She seemed perfection of true womanhood.

Almetta sat with eyes bent on the ground,

Their light by heavy lashes partly hid;

A wealth of ringlets loosely fell around

Her shapely neck and shoulders, and unbid

Her heart sent tender blushes to abound

Upon her cheek; and these were seen amid

The waving ringlets, which the breeze displaced,

Like rubies that some costly setting graced.

Her foot upon the sward did rise and fall

As if time to music it was keeping;

Her lips did move as if in answering call

To thoughts which o'er her soul were sweeping;

Yet uttered not the word which might appal

The silence which o'er the lea was creeping;

Her bosom, rising, falling, like the sea

In calm, was from the storm's fierce lashings free.

Her mind was wand'ring from the printed page

From which in careless mood she 'd been reading;

To scenes which early thought did once engage,

And along whose paths her soul was leading;

Again she roamed the fields of youth, ere age

For higher joys than the present 's pleading;

Again she played upon the springtime lea

A child, from ev'ry sense of sorrow free.

She had no thought that Mark was standing near,

Nor dreamed upon her his eyes were bending;

And, yet, in ev'ry thought he did appear

Along her path, as memory, wending

Its way through avenues of light and cheer,

Brought back the life which needs not defending.

She saw not Mark, nor dreamed in him her mood
Had waked the thought his mind had long eschewed.

Mark hesitated but a moment more,

Then advanced, put out his hand in greeting;

Almetta rose in effort to restore

The composure lost by sudden meeting;

Which from her cheek had sent the blush it bore
Back to her heart, now so loudly beating;

But as she recognized her youthful friend
Her heart new blushes to her cheek did send.

But Mark with ease and grace did lead her mind
In paths to which it had not stranger been;
Reverted to the past when they did find
Pleasure in each other's company; in
Words of burning eloquence he outlined
His life since they had parted, he to win
Laurels in his profession, but they were,
He said, not like early memories dear.

Almetta listened, on each word she hung,

As Mark retraced the gladsome paths of youth;

Lived o'er again the scenes which sweetly clung

About her heart, the legacy of truth

To riper years; not e'en his gifted tongue

Could paint in hues too bright the day ere tooth

Of Time puts on our hearts and in our flesh

The wounds which mem'ry makes to bleed afresh.

Almetta's soul with inspiration glowed

As pictures of the past Mark brought to view;

Again her feet traversed the sun-lit road

Of youth, always well worn, yet always new;

Again her life with joy and mirth o'erflowed,

And flowers in beauty and fragrance grew On ev'ry side; again with Mark she ran' In childish play, forgot he was a man.

The time sped quickly by, an hour flying

On wings so light Almetta scarce did heed

That the day around them fast was dying,

As Mark her mind 'long mem'ry's path did lead; Nor that the dew was on the green sward lying,

So sweet the joys on which her heart did feed.

She sat as one by subtle pow'r enthralled,

As Mark the happy scenes of youth recalled.

Ere darkness fell upon the scene she rose

And to her humble home her footsteps turned;

Mark walked beside her, talked of that repose,

One finds in life, when from the day he 's earned A night of rest; spoke of the good that flows

To humble walks in life; said he had learned
To look to them for pleasure, for he knew
They oft contained the only blessings true.

Spoke of society and of its ills,

Dwelt on the envies that are in it born;

Drew contrast 'tween them and the joy that fills

The heart, while life is yet within the morn

Of youth; declared such envies were the bills

One pays when he the social bank draws on,

And thus by words well chosen he did blind.

Perception to the thoughts that filled his mind.

Almetta's heart, taught only to confide,

Believed him in every word sincere;

Nor in the least her thoughts essayed to hide

Or other than herself deigned to appear;

E'en as to a brother she opened wide

The door to confidence, and naught in fear

Concealed from him who had a brother been

When years before they played upon the green.

And thus the acquaintance, by chance renewed,

To friendship grew as Mark did often seek

Almetta's home, and in her soul imbued

With higher purpose, which her life did speak,

Found what a nobler, better man had wooed

From highest, purest motives, which bespeak

The manly heart and generous nature

With which, on earth, God endows the creature.

Days, weeks and months on rapid wing went by,

And Autumn came with harvests garnered in;

Mark was her frequent guest, upon the sly,

And from Almetta her best smile did win;

For, blinded by her heart, she did not try

To find a reason why he never in

Broad daylight came, but always in the night

And but seldom then if the moon shone bright.

But Mark, unasked, in explanation said

That his profession kept him on the run;

And when he came to her he always fled

From duty that must needs be left undone;

Did he but wait for leisure, thus he plead,

His heart would never by the glowing sun

Of her bright smile be lighted; he would be

Kept from her away continually.

It was the tale, somewhat changed, however,

That married men resort to when the "lodge"

An excuse affords for them to sever

Home ties at night, and round the corner dodge,

To meet in revel companions clever,

And merry make o'er dish of rakish podge.

But soon Almetta's heart had far outgrown

Her tender years, and ev'ry word and look,

That he bestowed, was like the seed fresh sown

In land so tilled that deepest root it took,

And sprung to life and beauty; on his tone

She trembled with emotion deep, and shook

At his hand's touch and followed with her eyes

His steps as though they led to Paradise.

He was to her the substance of desire,

The one on whom all her love did center;

Within her bosom 'twas consuming fire

That burned and glowed in the soul 't did enter;

She loved, and in her heart love did inspire

The best and purest purpose, which lent here

Song to gladness, and did daily prove

The all-absorbing power of her love.

And she was happy, and her heart as light

As morning's mists on the meadows lying;

Or as the length'ning shadows when the night

Steals on day in arms of twilight dying;

The future to her heart and soul was bright

And free from tears, from regrets and sighing;

And, like the present, seemed replete with joy

And, like her love, exempt from base alloy.

She loved, and in the thought the deep-dyed hue
Of life's warm current went sweetly flowing
From heart to cheek, and o'er her pathway threw
The sun's warm rays, in whose early glowing,
When spring returns with balmy breeze and dew,
One goes abroad future harvests sowing;
And in anticipation garners in
A four-fold crop to fill the worldly bin.

Or as the sculptor who the marble takes

From nature's hand and chips off piece by piece;
But leaves the form which his conception makes,

And which his chisel deftly did release,
A thing of love, that in the heart awakes

A kindred love that lives but to increase;
So from love she chiseled her ideal

Nor thought nor feared it would prove unreal.

And she was happy, for she thought herself

Loved e'en as she loved, as true, as well;

Knew not the heart could be allured by pelf

And in a market base its best hopes sell;

Dreamed not that love could ever be like elf

A mischief-maker in the heart to dwell;

Be there to toy with hope and then take wings

And leave the soul a prey to bitter stings.

She knew this not, and when upon her hand

Mark placed the ring which their engagement sealed,
And said, though but a little golden band,

It was the type of love which had appealed

Long to his heart, life seemed to her a grand

And beauteous structure, in which concealed,

By veil of future lay the joys so rife

Whose full fruition comes with name of wife.

Oh, Love! thou sweetest child of human heart,

That rules with golden scepter in the breast;

How great the happiness thou dost impart,

When to the soul thou givest gentle rest.

Thy angel form 's too good for any mart

And I would hold thee ever-present guest;

There to remain resplendent over all

The virtues of this terrestrial ball.

A life of love is a life of beauty,

For inspiration is the child of Love;

It nerves the heart for each holy duty

And draws from living fountains far above;

It is the Tree of Life, always fruity,

And yet removed from cruel push and shove
One meets in rougher contact with his race

When once he enters on the worldly pace.

Great is the influence o'er the life of man

Of love, when from the earthy passion free;

'Tis then it from his soul removes the ban

And turns him to a blest eternity.

Never behind but leading Virtue's van.

Then why should I restrain my praise of thee,

Oh, Love! because some Cynic of me 'd say,

"It is the lion's skin, the donkey's bray?"

Oh, Love! thou art indeed fair nature's child,

A blithesome, happy lass, (if thou hast sex);

And whether tamed by time or running wild

In youthful heart, thou wast not born to vex;

Many the tender hours on which thou 'st smiled

In peasants' homes and palaces of Rex;

Joyous thyself, to joys thou lead'st the way,

Comfort of the grave, gladness of the gay.

Oh, bachelor, maid! wrinkled, old and gray,

Who walk the avenues of life forlorn;

Why point your bony digits at the gay

And wreathe your tasteless lips with smiles of scorn?

Can ye not see ye stand along life's way,

Misshapen statues, trav'lers to forewarn?

No warmth in life, no solace in thy ken,

Far from Cupid strayed, no hope in Hymen.

And when you say that love is but a blight,

A snare to catch the young and tender heart;

And that you live in shades of deepest night

Because you once acknowledged Cupid's dart;

Think not the eye has lost its prescient sight,

Or fails to see the envies now that start;

My judgment is, 'twas all a counterfeit,

You wasn't "in it", not "a little bit".

I hate the man, so lost to all concern,

That he steels his heart against impression,

And in the purest life does not discern

Something worthy of his best confession;

And in his soul feels not the fires burn

Which enforce to sentiment concession;

Who's lost to highest and to noblest good,

Nor bows his head to worth of womanhood.

I hate the term "to fall" when it implies

That we've caught on to Cupid's form so fair;

For it seems to me no misnomer lies

As it does here, for in the very air

We breathe, the earth beneath and in the skies

Are protests 'gainst expressions all so bare

Of romance, which we thus apply to love

As though to it one comes down from above.

As though he trips as on he stumbling goes

Without an aim the path of life to tread;

And then by accident he stumps his toes

And on the ground his sprawling form is spread;

His shins all bruised, and bleeding at the nose,

With pains in limbs and hips and back and head.

That is a simile fair, but Cupid

Isn't caught by such a process stupid.

If there's an up or down to love, it's not
When one fond heart is another wooing;
For man and woman find no brighter lot
Than in possession when done with sueing;
Though ups and downs come when the parent's got
A notion to stop the billing, cooing;
And calls the fair one to her room before
Her lover comes and firmly bars the door.

And thus on love puts parental damper

And shuts off the draft with lowering scowls;

And tries with parent's scorn love to hamper

And change its current with his frowns and growls;

Knows not the elf will return with scamper

As light and airy as domestic fowls,

When driven off and one thinks home ties loosed,

Return at night and seek the favored roost.

The "ups" are found, no doubt, when on ladder
The faithful lover to her window goes,
With step as noiseless as moving shadow
And drums the pane to wake her from repose;
The "downs" alas! when the heart's made sadder
By waking the sire who, with oaths and blows,
Assaults young Cupid, drives him from the scene,
And stops the hegira to Gretna Green.

But only for a time, for love by bars

Has never yet been holden; though not strong

And prone to war as other gods, like Mars

For instance, Cupid has a gentle song

Which breaks all bonds; which is and always was

All powerful to lead the heart along

The paths of peace as well as paths of ire

And in the end escape the vengeful sire.

The fact is, one don't "fall" in love at all,

But gets there in a kind of dreamy swim;

Or float which, something like the rolling ball,

When started down a steep incline with vim,

Onward rushes to the opposing wall

As though along the surface it did skim;

A kind of swim which ends in perfect bliss,

The least of whose pleasures is not the kiss.

The kiss, I mean, that 's matrimonial,

I'd not suggest, of course, another kind;

Especially when ceremonial

Is oft invoked to make and keep us blind

To those sweet essences, colonial,

Which in the kiss of love one 's sure to find.

Man may be imperfect, but he 's human

Enough when kissing to kiss a woman.

In this he differs not from womankind,

Who, I 've noticed, often kiss each other;

And while I 've no objections, to my mind

It 's doubling up the sweets when together

They join their lips, when they could eas'ly find

Some fair friend who has an elder brother;

And who, perhaps, has not so modest grown

That he life's simple joys would all disown.

But to our story: with the spring's return,

With birds and blossoms which one year before

Had filled her heart with love, caused it to yearn

For love, a change Almetta's life came o'er;

She moved as though her love had ceased to burn

With that bright glow it had in days of yore;

Listless, languid, and often shedding tears,

She seemed as one a prey to constant fears.

Her home, once bright, was now by gloom o'ercast,

Her soul bowed down as from constant toiling;

And she did weep, as if from out the past

Came a form from which she was recoiling;

And through her veins the blood went rushing fast

As if in her heart 'twas seething, boiling;

The flush that lit her cheek no longer came

From Love which Hope and Joy ignite to flame.

Companionship she did avoid of friends;

Shrank from the gaze of parents to her dear;

Shrank from the world like one who apprehends

Some sudden danger which is ever near,

And which to her excited fancy lends

The forms and shapes that fill with mortal fear.

Upon her brow sat Disappointment's shade

And Melancholy did her soul invade.

The heart, where gentle love had been enthroned,
Of dismal forebodings was now the haunt;
The voice, attuned to song, now only groaned
In sorrow; life, bereft of joy, stood gaunt
And wan, a specter of the Past; bemoaned
The harsh and cruel fate which seemed to taunt
The heart with joys that once it dwelt upon,
But now transformed to grinning skeleton.

But she bore on as woman oft has done

And uncomplaining saw the days go by;

Hoping he'd restore to the heart he'd won

The joy it always felt when he was nigh;

And when he came (though seldom now) she'd run

In haste to meet him, and suppress the sigh

With which her bosom heaved, and dry the lid

Oft overcharged with tears that came unbid.

Thus time went on and cheerless winter came,
And Mark his vacillating course pursued;
Oft made the promise but forebore his name
To bestow upon her; Almetta sued
In vain for recognition, and became
Convinced at last that he his promise rued;
Became convinced that his love had been
Assumed to hide a base-born purpose in.

She loved, but in her heart felt not the thrilling
Of that love by héart reciprocated,
Which to the mind and soul brings not the chilling
Of utter dread; she was like belated
Traveler on some lonely road unwilling
To proceed in darkness, but who 's fated
To grope his way and look in vain for light
Upon the road to cheer his weary sight.

Hers was the change which on a life is wrought

By that disease which feeds upon the soul;

When on the wings of ecstacy is caught

The aspiration of a life, and roll

All clouds beneath it; then suddenly fraught

With pain and tears it sees the longed-for goal

Slip from its grasp and further receding

Comes back to earth, wounded, sore and bleeding.

And why this change? Why had sorrow taken

The place within her soul where joy had reigned?

Was it because she had been forsaken,

Because the goal she 'd sought she 'd not attained? Yes, she 'd learned, alas! that Mark to waken

Love in her heart had love for her but feigned.

And it was knowledge of this faithlessness

That did her heart and mind and soul oppress.

Yes, it was this; was this and something more

Which hushed the song she was sweetly singing

When to her heart Mark came two years before

A tale of love, hope and beauty bringing;

But which, with lapse of time, her heart strings tore

And left her soul with agony wringing.

But the story 's better told in this note,

Which about this time she sent him. She wrote:

"I trusted thee with woman's holy trust,

Upon thy word, thy honor, I relied;

I felt the joys which knew not this disgust

And poignant sorrow; as expectant bride

I worshiped at thy feet, though mortal dust,

And would for thee most willingly have died.

I loved thee, but how well God only knows

Or why it is I suffer now these throes.

"Mine's a mortal anguish; take from me sting
Of social lash; leave me not thus to be
An outcast, hated and despised, a thing
Shunned by my sex, no longer willing, free,
To mingle with my kind. Oh! do not bring
Such dread reproach upon my purity.
My love, whate'er it was, has not deserved
The scorn of him whose fatal lust I served.

"Think of thy mother, gentle, loving, kind,
Who bore thee on her knee, who always true
To womanhood's best instincts; in her find
A type of me, save pain to folly due;
Then look within thyself and be not blind
To sense of right, but simple justice do
To one who loved you; yes, who loves you still
Despite the terrors which her soul now fill.

"Think of my mother, as she sees her pride
Bowed down in spirit, victim of this woe;
And in her anguish see what ills betide
A mother's heart; no pow'r can stop the blow
Save yours; be thou a man and to my side
Hasten at once ere I am forced to know
That thou'rt unworthy of the love I gave,
A wolf in clothing of the sheep, a knave!

"Then think of me, who loved you, ah! so well,
And ask thyself if this be treatment fair,
To let me suffer all the pangs of hell,
And earthly odium, which you should share
Alike with me; was 't I alone who fell
Into this sin? nay, thou also should'st bear
With me its obloquy, or now atone
As far as can be for the wrong that 's done.

"Unto thy manhood now make I appeal;
Be true unto thyself and unto me;
God only knows what his poor creatures feel
When once their faith is lost in constancy;
Mine was a love the heart could not conceal;
Thou wast its idol, broken though it be
It clings to thee, is yet beneath the spell;
Fulfill thy promise, all may yet be well.

"Yet for another I would plead. Alas!

For one who knows not earthly sin and shame;
A child of guilty love, but let that pass,
I seek for her the right her father's name
To bear throughout her life. Can you surpass
In baseness all that 's base, and let the blame
Of this our sin rest on her life, when she
Is yours and mine, is our progeny?

"Ponder well upon these things. Beware!

Hers is a sinless life, cruel the stain

That thou would'st put upon her, make her heir

To our disgrace and folly; it is plain

The path of solemn duty lies not where

Thy feet have strayed; heap not this needless pain

Upon a life whose innocence might prove

A blessing rich and sanctify our love.

"When on her face I gaze, look in her eyes,
And see the inspiration of her life,
A mother's joy is lost in tearful sighs,
A mother's heart yearns for the name of wife;
The only name beneath God's sun-lit skies
Which would renew my joy and stop the strife
Within my soul; but more for her so fair
Than for myself thy name I yearn to bear.

"But for my babe I might be well content

To give thee up, to see thee ne'er again;

For little's been the joy thy love has lent

To me, when I contrast the shame and pain,

Which now I suffer, with the hope that went

Deep in my foolish soul; how mad, how vain!

The passion seems when first I realized

That I was loved, but now know I'm despised.

"Nay, more than this; neglect I could forgive
If I alone its victim were to be;
For I might even be content to live
Out all my days in bitter misery
And self-seclusion, if the social sieve
Would justice do and separate from me
And from my sin the child unto me born,
And drive not in her flesh this galling thorn

"For this I can not hope, for social laws

Exist not for the fallen and the weak;

Then on thy honor, I command thee, pause;

And from my life and hers remove the bleak

And cheerless winter, which like canker gnaws

Upon my breaking heart; come thou and seek

With me forgiveness from our Father, God,

And pray he lift from her this chast'ning rod."

A day, a week, a month dragged slowly by

But the answer came not to her letter;

The shadow deepened on her life, her eye

Was suffused with constant tears; Almetta

Saw with many an agonizing cry

She was deserted; that she had set her

Heart on one to duty blind; one now lost

To proper sense of what her love had cost.

Her resolution was quickly taken,

Though much she dreaded to appeal to law;

She felt she could not in Mark awaken

A sense of right, to see as now she saw

Her true condition; she'd been forsaken,

Deserted, and for what? That he eclat

Might win in his profession and not be

United throughout life to such as she.

And what was she but what he'd made her?

Had she not been in every purpose true?

Had not his love to the very nadir

Of woman's existence brought her? She knew

The arts by which he sought to evade her,

And shun the blame to his and her sin due.

The truth was forced upon her, any her soul

Drank deep the dregs of Disappointment's bowl.

Her heart, her home, her life had been undone;

She had been robbed of that no pow'r on earth Could e'er restore; and now the only one,

Who could her comfort be, gave her but dearth
Of love and smypathy; the genial sun

Forebore on her to shine, and on her hearth
A shadow deep had settled; no bright ray
Vouchsafed a promise of returning day.

Oh, Sin! horrid is thy ill-shapen face,

When thou'rt seen in broken pledge to woman;

Condemned thou should'st be without day of grace,

For of all sins thou 'rt the most inhuman;

The pangs of second death attend thy pace;

(True, the law provides that she may sue man),

But when she sues and gets a just decree,

It only gives her shame publicity.

The social laws are sadly out of joint,

When by their canons stands the dread decree,

That she who errs, though only once, must point

Downward her course to deeper misery;

And from vortex of sin, lift up, annoint,

The head of her destroyer with a free

And unsought pardon; better to reverse

The law, and let on man's head rest the curse,

And herein lies the gravest social sin

Of this our age; upon the weak we turn

The back of deadly scorn because she's been

Blinded by love, could not in him discern

The thought impure that lurked his smile within,

By which she was deceived; 'tis she we spurn

Instead of him, and on her life we place

The burden of what should be his disgrace.

The question 's one, not of position, for

The humbler place she holds in social state,

The more protection she 's in need of, nor

The less she should receive; he 's base ingrate,

And his design all true men should abhor,

Who seeks, in guise of love, to underrate

Her virtuous scruples, and then to claim

The right to vilify Love's holy name.

What 's position? What is it after all,

Save accident of birth or merit's meed?

And who 'll deny that some of those who fall

Wholly reclaimed might be, if gently freed

From drinking of that bitter, social gall,

Which oft contains the soul-destroying seed

Which oft contains the soul-destroying seed Of this life and the next? which breeds despair On earth and takes from heaven its joys rare?

But to return; Almetta realized

That she had been deceived, that he had sought Her love with evil purpose and, disguised

In soft and gentle speech, that he had brought Into her home a viper; she had prized

His seeming love; she knew not it was fraught
With misery, for she had ever been
Confiding, true; she had no thought of sin.

Hers was the sin of weakness; as the clay
In potter's hands he could her mold at will;
To her his love had come as brightest day
The yearnings of a woman's heart to fill;
To him her love was nothing save a way
Of pleasantry and pastime; and until
He saw the flower droop in mute despair
Did he give the future one thought of care.

E'en then, with utter baseness of his kind,

He turned his back upon her; ceased to call

As was his wont to see her; he was blind

To ev'ry manly duty; said her fall

To others, not himself, was due; to find

Cause of reproach, his sland'rous tongue the pall

Of lowest depths of sin put on her name,

And sought in her disgrace to hide his shame.

Almetta was not wanting friends who came

With tidings of this baseness; to her heart

It was like gall and wormwood, and the flame

Of love was well nigh quenched; the fatal dart

Of slander stung her spirit, caused her name

By those who knew her to be mocked; its smart

Nerved her to desperation, and she wrote

To her faithless lover this final note:

"I wrote you briefly sev'ral days ago

But have received no answer; I assume,

Though such conclusion I 've been very slow

To reach, that you 've determined in the gloom

Of this, our mutual sin, to leave me; go

Into thy former haunts despite the bloom

Which from my cheek has faded; take no thought

How dearly unto me my shame was bought.

"Believing this, I would unto you speak,
Calmly and without anger, for I feel,
Though I have sinned, it was because I 'm weak,
Because I was not strong my heart to steel
'Gainst thy seductive wiles; I did not seek
Thy love; I was content with modest weal,
And not till thou didst on my path appear
Did I aspire to thy higher sphere.

"Mine was an humble but a virt'ous home,

Before I knew the blight of treach'rous love;

(Pardon the word, 'twere sinful thus to gloam

Such passion with a term that 's born above);

A place it was where modest joys did roam

Untrammeled, free; where Conscience did approve

The simple lives that tend to modest worth

And throw their light upon the parent hearth.

"Into this home an artful cunning came,
Personified in likeness of a man;

'Twas yours, the scion of an honored name,
But, armed against my peace with deadly ban,

You sought me out and put the blush of shame
Upon a cheek, which nature once did fan

Into an honest warmth; which had no pain

And which was from the heart its best refrain.

"Thy tale of love was pleasant to my ear,

The first I'd ever heard from lips of man;

What wonder then that I should stop to hear

Thy words, or that my heart unto thee ran?

Disguised as love, I saw no scalding tear

Lurk in thy words; to me they were the van

Of Joy's procession grand, almost divine,

And such I treasured up and thought them mine.

"You know the rest, how with deceitful word

And manner smooth and sweetly cadenced voice,

You won upon my heart; how like the bird,

Long caged, I flew to thee, made thee my choice,

And with a woman's love my heart did gird;

Nor stopped to ask if thy love would invoice
At all the worth it seemed to have for me.
Knowing my truth, I thought no wrong of thee.

"I loved you; nay, that's hardly word as strong
As I might use to make my feelings known;
It was a power, gifted with a song
Of richest melody; a breeze that's blown
From heav'nly shores upon a desert long
Unused to verdure, and where sands alone
Greet the tired gaze; it was in me the sum

Of human hope, a type of heav'n to come.

"In fullness of this hope I took delight,

For 'twas my meat, my drink, my life, my all;

It was the flower which I thought no blight

Could e'er o'ertake; the strong, enduring wall

Of my protection; in the darkest night

It would, obedient to my heart's call,

Surcease of sorrow yield, and ever be

Of love's rich fruit a good, prolific tree.

"Such was the love I gave; such the power

For all that 's good and true it might have been;
But thou hast made me rue the fatal hour

When first I saw you, when thy smile did win

A heart imbued with love for ev'ry flow'r

That bloomed its path along; a soul that sin,

Of that degrading kind which now I feel,

Had never entered, its best hopes to steal.

"You did that home, that heart, that life invade
With guilty purpose; you did rudely take
The brightest gem that can adorn the maid,
And leave her heart bereft, when for your sake
Alone she sinned; and now you would degrade
Your child and mine, and by desertion make
Of her a thing of scorn; escape the blame
And e'en deny to her your sullied name.

"You have been deaf to all entreaty; would

That I had words to move you to the right;

But I 've appealed in name of thy manhood,

The mother's name, honor's, our babe's; in light

Of Conscience now aroused in vain; no good

Seems in thy heart to be; and in this night

Of anguish I am left to brood alone

Upon the sin for which you should atone.

"Among my friends my word you have denied,
You 've scoffed at pledges which to me you gave;
You 've said you ne'er intended me your bride
To make; you 've said in substance, 'Let her rave
For she 's the victim of a silly pride;

Her words are vain, not worth attention grave'.

And this is my reward, thus to be stung

In my disgrace by words of lying tongue.

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"I do not threaten you; far be it now

From me to call down vengeance on your head;

Beneath the blow I would most humbly bow,

Although my sin doth burn like molten lead,

Could I but take the stain from off her brow,

And save her from the fate I so much dread;

A nameless child, a waif, a thing of scorn,

Her parentage denied, herself ill born.

"To her I owe a duty, solemn, true,

The highest of a parent, and shall see,

If there be law, despite thy name, that you

In open court shall be adjudged to be

Her sire; the one above all others who

Should her and me protect; in that decree,

Though I may not secure thy family name,

I'll make you share with me and her this shame.

"Such is my purpose; from 't I will not swerve;

To-morrow, if you do not right the wrong

By giving me your name and thus observe

That moral right you did neglect too long,

With writ from legal court I will you serve

And bind your limbs with felon's galling thong;

I know the law and will to it appeal

Lest thy pledged word be fixed with legal seal.

"I'll write to you no more; if you will do
But simple justice unto me and mine,
I will, as I have always been, be true
To thee in ev'ry word and thought; be thine
In purest, highest sense, which once I knew
Before I met thee; now obey divine
And mortal's highest law, or share with me
The bitter curses of this obloquy."

By special messenger the letter went

To Mark's own hand; trembling he broke the seal
And read it through; his brow with dark intent,

And which he made no effort to conceal,
Was clouded o'er; the pages he then rent
In many pieces; on them placed his heel,
As though her words he 'd grind into the floor,
And turning, without answer, shut the door.

And, as he was bidden, recounted all

That had occurred; told how his face had burned

When the door, which opened into the hall,

Was slammed upon him; how her letter, spurned

And torn in pieces, did around him fall;

Also how Mark did look, his bosom swell,

And other things on which I need not dwell.

Almetta paid the bill, 'twas forty cents,

For he 'd been gone two hours; 'twas right

She should, he said, though he'd sat on a fence

Most of the time to watch a childish fight

Between two boys; he cared not for expense,

If Almetta paid it, (for he was bright),

And early learned the comp'ny would reprove

The boy who served with quick and honest move.

One of the things I can not understand
Is why a messenger is said to run,
And always advertised to be at hand
When he is seldom in, if you want one;
Nor why, when got, his feet should to the land
Tenacious cling, as if he weighed a ton;
Unless it be that all the laggards go
Into a service which rewards the slow.

And I'd like to say, if it 's in season,

Of all the bores the public rely on,

The messenger service without reason

Is one of the greatest; worse than fly on

Or "in" the ointment; and if 't aint treason,

I'll include "Administration pie" on

The party "pie counter," always so high

It only serves to feed the tallest fly.

But messengers at twenty cents an hour,

When love is chilled by winter cold and bleak,

Are not too dear; and save in them the pow'r

Of corporation's shown, when for a week.

At two dollars they 're got, as they now are,

One 'd hardly cause of criticism seek;

But when at figures such the boys are hired

The charge for service makes a lover tired.

A corporation is one of those things

Which has no soul, so Andrew Jackson said;

And those who feel its many biting stings,

Which prick fair patience's flesh till it is red,

Are prone to wish the saint would don his wings,

And back to mortal earth would from the dead

Return, and hurl an old-time philippic

Against the wrongs which make us all heart sick.

If he should come from home above divine,

And try his hand at righting things below;

I would suggest he'd make the comp'ny sign

Agreement to compel the boys to go

At least one mile an hour or resign,

Or on the business put his saintly blow.

All corporations seem to have license

To prey upon us since Andrew went hence.

But if you wish to reach perfection

In patience here, then try the telephone;

You needn't mind about the inflection,

No matter whether high or low; your tone

However guided by circumspection,

Can never penetrate the frigid zone

Of the operator's blandness; she'll vow

Nine times in ev'ry ten, "They're talking now".

And when not "talking now" you trembling hang
To the receiver but no word receive,
Hoping for an answer, bang-bang, bang-bang
Goes the transmitter in your ear; you grieve,
As through your luckless brain the awful clang
Resounds, but from which there is no reprieve.
You ask, "Why is it that you treat me so?"
And she responds, "H-e-l-l-o, hel-lo, hello!"

If there's a woman in this happy land,

Who's monarch of what man surveys and more,

It is the girl who always holds a hand

Of trumps at the Exchange; one may be sore

And out of patience, but his earthly sand

Will many, many times run out before

She answers 'less she wants to; she's of those

Who have mankind both by the ear and nose.

It 's not worth while to get out of humor,

Or with impatience vig'rous protests blend;

She's got you by the ear; you're consumer,

In legal sense, and to you she'll attend

When she gets ready; she's not a Bloomer

But knows when she's got you at her wire's end.

It does no good to fret and fume and scoff,

For she all protests meets with "Oh, ring off!"

And you "ring off" and "ring off" so will I,

Almetta paid the bill, 'twas forty cents;

But 'twas not that which made her deeply sigh,

Or caused her feelings to grow more intense With anguish; but Mark's manner did imply

To him she need not look for recompense

For sin and shame; his actions plainly said

That of a felon's chains he had no dread.

To-morrow came and went, the next day, too,

Dragged slowly by, but the faithless lover

Came not his promise to fulfill, and sue

For her forgiveness; and seek to cover With holy wedlock, which to her was due,

His shame and hers; put around, above her, That strong protection which a man may give And which, e'en such a stain, may oft outlive.

To-morrow! A problem solved yet unsolved,

Unsolvable; transparent yet opaque;

An equasion, whose quantity evolved,

Is yet unknown; a phantom whose make

Is now a substance, now a shade; involved

In mystery profound; from it we take

Pleasure and pain, sorrow, joy and gladness,

Delight, distress, bliss and woe and sadness.

To-morrow! a volume within a word

Encompassed—hope, fear, life, death—to-morrow;

For thy duties many their loins must gird

And enter thy paths bowed down with sorrow;

But unto many thou 'rt arrayed like bird

Of Paradisal plumage; they borrow

Thy pleasures in bright anticipation

And greet thy coming with rich ovation.

To-morrow! In thy dawn a perfect day

To youth appears, in whose roseate tints

The call to pleasure 's seen, which to obey

Is greater pleasure; no deep foot-prints

Of pain can be distinguished in the clay

Of which they 're made; no poignant sorrow stints

Their joy; to them the morrow is serene

With no angry cloud the sun and them between.

To-morrow! The fruition of the Past

To early womanhood and manhood; fixed

By God's decrees eternal to outlast

The ages; with pleasure and duty mixed

'Twill surely come; then stand not thou aghast,

Nor shun its proper burdens, for betwixt

Pleasure and pain, sorrow and joy, thy fate,

'Tis so decreed, shall be to alternate.

To-morrow! Thou art to parents time

When all the joys, which in the infant lies

Concealed, will fructify in life sublime

And give the heart what it does highly prize;

Making old age a bright and sunny clime

To them; calmly they look through youth's diguise

And see developed in the future far

The joys which sense of sorrow'll never mar.

To-morrow! To the old, infirm and weak

Thou art a day of rest, a wondrous balm

For all the ills of life and time; they seek

Thy face in joy, for in thee is the calm

Of an eternal peace, in which the bleak

And wintry winds chill not; concluding psalm

Of life thou art, and patiently they wait

For God in love to open wide the gate.

The morrow came and went, but Almetta

No word received; she saw she must demand

Justice from the court; Mark's silence whet her

Resentment to an edge that finest brand

Made at Sheffield would not bear; it set her

Purpose deeper in her soul, and with hand

Upraised in court she affidavit made

And on our Mark the hand of law was laid.

Mark's due arrest a great sensation made,

The greatest known in his native city,

For many years; without respect to grade

The people agreed it was a pity

That such a lovely girl should be betrayed

And cruelly deserted; 'twas fit he

Should suffer for his crime; no social state,

They said, should screen him from his well earned fate.

A crowd, it is a scandal; 'twill surpass,

As an excitant, agonizing shout

Of fire in a country town, where, alas!

No fire apparatus is near about

And where, indeed, the water's always scarce;

It is a morsel which all gossips find

Dished up in court to suit the vulgar mind.

The case was called for trial; most intense

Was the prevailing int'rest, which was shown

By presence of the old and young; suspense

Was well defined for the scandal had grown

To vast proportions; as yet Mark's defense,

If he had any, was a secret known

Only to his counsel, and they refused

To talk, except to say Mark was abused.

The legal battle did at once begin

With motion the indictment to annul,

Upon the ground that there was a flaw in

Its construction, and from books they did cull

Authorities in hopes the case to win

Without a trial, and the judge to gull,

By quoting here and there from crim'nal law

And charging this and that to be a flaw.

Almetta's counsel was prepared to meet

All objections urged, and to show

That Cooley, and others no less discreet

Had on these very points said so and so,

In words and figures which they did repeat

In presence of the court; and then did go

Into discussions, which were so abstruse,

To follow them would be of little use.

Aye, worse than useless, for when a legal

Contention 's on between men always flush

With points of law, it becomes so regal

That common folks had better to the brush Betake themselves; like the sea-gull,

Lawyers oft soar where they 're above the crush Of ordinary minds, into a waste

Where diamonds sparkle though they be but paste.

It was a battle royal, in a sense,

Though badly mixed with terms of legal cant;

Which were thrown in as "earnings" by defense

But which of argument were very scant;

The crowd, however, thought it was immense,

Though to the judge it was but legal rant;

Turning to counsel, "The bill is sustained,"

He said. "Let the prisoner be arraigned."

Almetta sat beside her counsel; on

Her lap her infant lay and laughed and cooed;

Played with the sunbeams as they fell upon

Its dress of snowy whiteness; for its mood

Was in sharp contrast with the woe-begone

Expression of its father; who did brood

In sullen anger just across the room,

But tried to hide the deepness of his gloom.

The jury was composed of honest men,

Husbands of loving wives, fathers of sons

And of modest daughters; 't was sworn and when,

There 'd been exploited by opposing guns

On either side some further legal ken,

In quantities which would weigh many tons,
Had such stuff weight, the judge said he 'd proceed
To try the cause, and hoped there 'd be more speed.

Mark was arraigned, and to the charge he plead

"Not guilty"; but for once the blood of shame

Coursed madly through his veins, and blush o'erspread

His guilty features; when Almetta's name

Was called, she modestly rose and was led

To the witness chair, where, with trembling frame

And voice, she told the story of her life

And of Mark's pledge to make of her a wife.

Told how he 'd come into her humble home,

Ere yet she 'd seen her eighteenth summer dawn,

With honeyed words and vowed he 'd never roam

From her away; how on the moon-lit lawn

His ring he gave her; how on ev'ry tome

Of sacred Scriptures he had freely drawn,

To prove that Love was of the heav'nly throng

Of virtues, and when true could do no wrong.

"I have known him for many years", she said,

"And put reliance on his spoken word;

And when he made the promise me to wed,

And did with golden band my finger gird,

I did believe I'd be to altar led;

I put away all doubts as too absurd

For woman's bosom; I could not believe

He'd sought me out with intent to deceive.

"And when I found that in an evil hour
I all had lost that's to a woman dear,
I turned to him and thought his manly pow'r
Would be invoked to save me from the drear,
Cold eye of scorn, protect me from the show'r
Of darts which now upon me fall; be near
To throw around me his protecting arm
Which throughout life would shield me from all harm.

"To him I did appeal, not once but more,
Entreated him to come to my rescue;
To think how great the load of pain I bore,
To think how much of it to him was due;
Upon my bended knee I did implore
That he would unto me and my babe do
An act of manly justice; be to me
A husband, father to his progeny.

"This child is his; here I make solemn oath
It was by him begotten; I do swear
In presence of this court (though I was loth
This action to begin) that I did bear
This child unto him; that in its veins doth
Flow the blood of the defendant; declare
The charge I make against him not in rage,
But only that he bear its parentage."

Mark's defense was merely a denial

Of all which she in testifying said;

He tried to show that it was a vial

Of wrath that she was breaking on his head;

And swore in the heat of bitter trial

That he had never promised her to wed;

Nor did he ever give with golden band

Solemn pledge to bestow on her his hand.

His manner on the stand was that of one,

Who felt that he did greatly condescend

To testify; that the prosecution

Was based on malice, and he did defend

From sense of duty only; 't was begun

Money to extort and his fame to rend

In pieces; and he was so innocent

It grieved him to be charged with such intent.

A sneer was on his face when he referred

To the plaintiff; his association

With her, he said, by merest chance occurred;

And when he learned of the fascination,

Under which she labored, he was deterred

From further visits; hoped separation

Might prove a cure; might e'en obliterate

A love which he could not reciprocate.

He had not, he said, a promise given

Which even she could well construe to mean

That his heart by Cupid's shock was riven,

Or in Almetta he had ever seen

Ideal of a wife; were he driven

To make a choice the jail and her between,

He'd choose the former; he would not be won

To marriage by a wrong he had not done.

But when Almetta's counsel did him take

Along the paths which he had swiftly gone
In his evidence in chief, he did break,

And halt and hesitate and look forlorn,

And contradict himself till in his make

No sneer was left, like that which sat upon His face when he began; but in its stead Confusion's blush appeared like crimson red.

And passed out slowly to a distant room;

Where they in quiet might consult and draw

Conclusion just as to defendant's doom;

Or let him go acquit, if fit they saw,

And, clearing him, erect Almetta's tomb

Of infamy; the foreman silence broke,

When they had reached the room, and thus he spoke:

"If I were legislator, which I'm not,
I'd pass a law which would such cases meet;
I'd put the man in prison till he'd rot
And to his victim I would have escheat
His whole estate and all his father's got;
Unless he'd marry and agree to treat
Her as his wife, her child as his, and give
Bond this to do as long as he should live.

"Nay, I would follow him beyond the shore
Of time, and if he died before she went
To her account (which I would not deplore),
I'd give her everything he had not spent
And put a mortgage on his future store
Of life eternal; him I'd make repent
Of his unholy sin, alive and dead,
And all his kind I'd fill with mortal dread.

"That would be my verdict; do as you please,

I 'll not hold out against eleven men;

But I would like right well his neck to squeeze

Just once; I 'd draw my grip so tight that when

I let him go he 'd not be fit to grease

A cross-cut saw; I would not send such men

To prison; and thus I would save the state

These honest views, somewhat extreme, no doubt,

Expense of feeding them at any rate."

Were held by others, but they thought it best To avoid extremes and give him about

Two years in prison. "They 'll shave off his crest Of hair," they said, "and beard, and he 'll come out

A better man; perhaps locate out West And there unknown grow up and cultivate The virtues which he here does underrate."

A silence, solemn, deep, fell on the scene

As the jurors did the court-room enter;

Mark, though ill at ease, tried to look serene

For he knew on him all eyes did center;

Almetta, pale and wan, did try to screen

Her face with fan from brazen gaze; bent her

Eyes upon her babe's sweet face; her heart beats

Could be plainly heard at the jurors' seats.

"Have you, gentlemen, on a verdict yet

Agreed"? the judge did ask of him who'd been

Chosen foreman. "We have; you'll find it set

Out in words and figures fully herein

This paper", he said; and the clerk did get

It from his hand; to read it did begin;

"We find defendant guilty, and him we give

Two years in prison, should he so long live."

A silence deeper on the court-room fell

But only for a moment; Almetta

Was by friends at once surrounded; a yell

Of wild approval rent the air; met her

Ears from every quarter; it was the knell

Of all Mark's worldly hopes; 'twas like fetter

Galling to his heart and pride; it was more

Than he had thought for him could be in store.

"Order!" the sheriff demanded; "Order!"

"At once be seated", sternly cried the judge;

But the crowd, which stood on riot's border,

Seemed not to hear as each the other'd nudge

And, pointing to Mark who had outlawed her,

Cried; "Put on the shackles, don't let him budge!"

While others said it was a shame that when

His guilt was clear they didn't give him ten.

"Stand up, the sentence of the court receive",

The judge commanded; "If you 've aught to say

Why sentence should not be pronounced, relieve

Your mind by saying it; the court will pay

Attention to your words; you, I believe,

Have had a trial fair." No answer; "Nay,

Then with thy sentence I will proceed

And bid you to my words give lasting heed.

"In passing sentence I will not refrain

From speaking truly of your dastard act;

And while I hope I'll never be again

Called to preside in such a case, the fact

Should be impressed on those who willful stain

Put on a woman's honor, that exact

And even-handed justice does not know

Any distinction between high and low.

"Vantage of social sphere you have possessed,

Likewise all that wealth and high position

Could give; you have been petted and caressed

In social halls; yet, to her condition

You did betake yourself; for her professed

The highest, truest love; but your mission,

Disguised as love, was one of infamy

Designed to rob her of her purity.

"Yours is a sin that has been long contemned
By civil and by God's eternal laws;
It was in David righteously condemned,
When Uriah he sent into the jaws
Of certain death; its evil has dismemb'd
More homes within our land than all the flaws
Of human character besides; its stain
Clings to its victim like the curse of Cain.

"Thine is a crime against society,

Not one, but all, because it brings thy shame

Upon the innocent; no piety

In mother or in child can cleanse the name

Of her who bears it now; satiety

Is a thing unknown to those who blame

A woman, and thy sin will follow her

Through life, and put a stain upon her bier.

"You have the highest moral law defied,

And so it's been adjudged by these, thy peers,

(The term through legal flaw is misapplied)

That you at work shall serve the state two years;

In prison I adjudge thee to abide;

It is a painful duty, but my tears

Are shed for her whom you have thus deceived,

The tender heart you have so deeply grieved.

"Sheriff, take the prisoner now to jail

And speedily prepare him to transfer

To prison; no longer can he on bail

Remain; but on thy bond, I charge thee, sir,

To keep him safe; be vigilant, nor fail

Aught in thy duty; if you should incur

Extra expense for guard or bailiff, I

Will make the order such things to supply."

Subdued applause the timely sentence met,

As Mark was hurried from the room to jail;

An ashen hue o'erspread his face, as yet

The first emotion he had shown; for bail

His counsel then applied but could not get

Approval of the court; 'twould not avail,

The judge declared, for when the sentence 's passed

It is of legal steps the very last.

Without delay he was at once transferred

To prison, and within its gloomy walls

Put at hard labor; to which he demurred

At first, but when informed that duty's calls

Must be obeyed, he wisely ceased to beard

The "Cat" within her den, whose cry appals

The stoutest heart; but did as was advised,

Though in his cell he thus soliloquized.

"Oh, fool I was! when ev'ry path in life
Was leading me to highest honors on;
When Joy knew not the deadly throes of strife
And Guilt's dark shade sat not my soul upon;
To drive with ruthless hand this keen-edged knife
Into my bosom, and for one ill born
Blast every manly hope, and covered see
My name with everlasting infamy.

"Oh, fool! for a moment's sinful pleasure

Thus to exchange thy hope of heav'n and earth;

To fill the future with Horror's measure

And feel in present moment pangs of birth

Of Sin, Remorse and Shame; lost 's the treasure

Which might have been a thing of noble worth,

Had I obeyed the impulse with whose start

I felt a better purpose in my heart.

"The Cat! and has it come to this, that I

At least suggestion of thy name do quail?

When I, a boy, despised thy claw and cry,

In manhood now I tremble at thy tail?

As if, and yet I know no reason why,

I felt thy claws my bared back to assail.

Alas! it is too true, thy very name

A tremor sends throughout my guilty frame.

"Well I remember, how with rock and club,

I drove thee from the shed where nightly sat

Thee and thy mate, when thou didst teach thy cub,

With unearthly wauls and many a spat,

Thy horrid notes; and how thy young in tub

I drowned while yet a kitten, that a cat

It might not grow to be; but naught avails

Against nine lives, nor here against nine tails.

"And when thy form I rudely did dissect,

Ere trusted with human corpse, I found

Thy lungs were perfect and might well eject

The varied notes discordant which they sound;

And all thy muscles such thou might'st elect

Always to fall with feet upon the ground;

But when I sought thy lungs that never fail,

I little dreamed of power in thy tail.

The Cat! I 've heard it said thou hast nine lives,
I never doubted that thou hast nine wails;
For, hushing eight, I 've found that one survives
And that the ninth rarely, if ever, fails;
But till, like me immured, one seldom dives
Into the hidden myst'ries of thy tails:
And, yet, it is not strange that life feline
Should still exist in deadly 'Cat-o'-Nine.' ''

And there we leave him, in the prison dark,

At work by day, at night in lonely cell,

Restless, chafing, no longer like the Mark.

He was on lawn or 'neath the glowing spell

Of Almetta's worth, which, when in the park

They met, and in her presence on him fell.

He chose the baser path and him it led

Where fires of remorse by remorse are fed.

With falt'ring steps Almetta left the room,

And sought her home in agony of grief;

She 'd followed her betrayer to the doom

Which was his proper meed; but on the leaf,

On which was written his, she saw the tomb

Of all her hopes outlined; it was in brief

Death warrant to her infant's life and hers

And doomed them both to mis'ry and to tears.

Almetta gazed with loving tenderness

Upon her babe which was sweetly sleeping
In perfect peace and beauty; and did press

Her lips upon its cheek; as though leaping
Into stronger life with her soft caress,

A tiny hand was raised and went creeping O'er her cheek, as though it would fain essay To brush, in love, her scalding tears away.

And as a tear fell on the infant cheek,

In sweet response its loving, tender eyes

Were opened wide; as though its heart did seek

An explanation of the bitter cries

Which from maternal heart, now lone and weak,

Did flow; and in them were reflected dyes

With which the vault above could not compare

So deep the azure blue was of the pair.

But only for a moment did they ope

Upon the mother, then again in sleep

They gently closed, as if they could not cope

With drowsiness, which o'er the lids did creep;

But that one glance was like the light that broke

Upon the land and o'er the face of deep,

When from the darkness of the first great Night

A Voice was heard to say, "Let there be light".

For it the mother's heart did penetrate

And fill her soul with momentary peace;

Did banish from her thoughts her direful fate,

And from her bitter woe give brief release;

But only for a moment, for the gate

To Sorrow ere long opened, and increase

Of sorrow gave; she felt herself within

That she, she loved, would live to curse her sin.

The babe's bright eyes were closed in peaceful sleep;
Almetta o'er it bent and put a kiss

Upon its lips; a smile did sweetly creep
Over its infant face, as though 't were bliss

To feel that in a mother's heart a deep,
Abiding love existed, and in this

'T would find protection till its tender feet

Could bear the rougher paths of life to meet.

The infant slept the sleep of innocence;

Saw not the cloud which o'er its young life hung;

Knew not that anguish was the recompense

Of sin, which from its mother's heart was wrung;

Dreamed not that on its being the offense

'Gainst social laws, which to its mother clung,

Would descend to it, make its tender life

A thing despised, and with its peace mix strife.

The babe slept on, its bosom rose and fell

Like gentle undulations of rays of light;

Which from the East announce the dawn; foretell

The sun's approach, the waning of the night;

Or like the ocean, when in calm, its swell

Yet lifts the head of crested wave to hight,

Which shows the power that within it lies

And presence of majestic force implies.

It slept and dreamed, perchance of some sweet clime

Whose winding paths no sinful feet indent;

Whose joys are far above the things of time

And, yet, to infant sleep are sometimes lent,

That we may from their smiles secure sublime

And holy inspiration; that intent

In us may be as high, as pure, as good

And innocent as sleep of babyhood.

Almetta wept; her pent-up feelings burst

Into a flood of tears; her emotion

Was like the rush of torrent when the thirst

Of earth is quenched, and unto the ocean

The swollen rivers go; and no man durst

Attempt to stay their waters; her portion

In life was one of deep, consuming dread

From which no avenue of hope e'er led.

"Oh, child of Sin!" in sadness she exclaimed,

"How sweet thy smile in contrast with the frown
Which does my life oppress; sure God has aimed

To curse me with my sin, to bow me down,
And on my head the vials unrestrained

Of his just wrath to pour; in the renown
Of shame and guilt and fear and misery,
I feel the sting of his just penalty.

Which in this life will ever weigh thee down,
All good would not appear to me as dross,
Nor would I tremble at the worldly frown
Which is upon me turned; for ev'ry loss
Would find some compensation in the crown
Of happiness which thou wouldst wear; I'd be
Content to be despised, were 't not for thee.

"Yes, to be despised, I would be content,

Could from thy life I lift the dismal shade

Which unto it my grievous sin has lent

And which will all thy future life pervade;

But when, in after years, thine eyes are bent

Upon a mother, whom this sorrow 's made

Decrepit ere her time, oh! do not find

Cause of reproach because her love was blind.

"Turn not upon me as the world has turned,
Nor think thy mother could be wholly bad,
Because in evil hour her poor heart burned
With love, designed by God to make life glad,
But which the meed of sin and shame has earned
From passion; to her sorrow do not add
That bitter cup from which a mother 'd drink
If from her touch the child she bore should shrink.

"Thy purity, I own, is sad reproach
Unto my sin, for I in thee behold

That innocence which, ere sin did encroach
Upon me, and the monster did enfold

Me in his coils, was mine; he did approach
And win me as the Serpent did of old

Our common mother; for my Eden gave

The curse which follows e'en beyond the grave ".

A smile of beauty which was infinite

In sweetness; as though the angels had massed
Their power eternal to throw on it

A ray from throne above; which should outlast
The gloom that on Almetta's life did sit

Like pall of death, and thus to her might give
The inspiration yet to bear and live.





"Oh, God!" she said, "behold a mortal frail, Scorn not the very humblest of thy dust".

Again Almetta kissed her babe; gazed long
Upon its placid features; thought of all
She had endured, of the grievous wrong
Which had been done her; of the social pall
Which rested on her life; of him whose song
Of love betrayed her, who had caused her fall;
And with her heart full near to bursting, there
She knelt beside her babe to God in prayer.

"Oh, God!" she said, "behold a mortal frail,
Scorn not the very humblest of thy dust;
List to thy creature, hear her saddest wail,
Add not thine anger to the deadly thrust
Of conscious guilt, which doth the soul assail
And which doth chill the heart like wintry gust.
Thou know'st how deep I rue the fatal hour
I fell beneath the tempter's lustful pow'r.

"Oh, God! have mercy on thy weakest child,

Cleanse thou her inmost heart from sinful guilt;

Give her thy gracious peace; remove the wild

And fearful frenzy which would to the hilt

Sink in her heart the dagger, and defiled

Usher her soul into thy presence; wilt

Thou not, oh, God! thy creature thus relieve,

And give her aching heart thy sweet reprieve?

"Father of mercies, look thou on me;

Hide not thy face in anger from my soul;

Turn but one friendly glance that I may see

In peace thy smiling face; hide not the goal

Of heav'nly love; help me, my God, to be

Once more thy creature; I drink deep the bowl

Of bitter misery; take from my path

The soul-destroying shadow of thy wrath.

"Renew again, oh, God! thy gentle love
Within my soul; make me again to feel
Those tender bands which, stretching from above,
Unite thee with thy creatures; place the seal
Of thy forgiveness on me; gently prove
Thy Word of Truth, that when thy creatures kneel,
Thou 'lt have compassion on their lowly need
Nor bruise the heart, nor break the tender reed.

"Father of mercies, hear my humble prayer;

Heal thou the heart that 's broken by this blow;

Quench not the emotions that linger there,

But purify them in their genial flow

To this, my babe; oh! may it not despair

To reach that perfect statue here below

Of womanhood; God guide her tender feet

In paths than were her mother's more discreet.

"Rest not on her, oh, God! a mother's sin;

Deal gently with her young and tender life;

If suffering must needs atone, mine's been

Enough for both; if not, sink deep the knife

Into my soul; no edge can be so keen

But that its thrust would be with pleasure rife,

If for my sin 'twould make the just amend,

And from its consequence my babe defend.

"For it I pray, not for myself alone;

Thou knowest that I find here no delight;

And save for this, bone of my bone,

And flesh of mine, this innocence so bright,

I would the world, heav'n, and myself disown,

And plunge me now into abyss of night.

Oh! heav'enly Father, stop thy erring child,

Drive from her mind these frenzied thoughts so wild.

"Have mercy on my babe; shed on 't thy smile;

Comfort her life through all succeeding years;

Help me to rear her in thy nurture while

Lonely I walk beneath this weight of tears;

Eradicate from heart and life all guile;

Fill her, oh, God! with tender, loving fears

To wound thy love, or now unto thee take

My child, and let the heart, that's bursting, break.

"Oh! God of heaven and of earth, come thou
In tender mercy to these stricken hearts;
Be thou their life; record, oh, God! my vow,
Which from a better, higher impulse starts;
Resigned and humble my bared back I'll bow
And uncomplaining bear the social smarts,
If thou'lt but help me rear this babe of mine
In humbleness to worship at thy shrine.

"For me there's little left but darkest days,

Strife and contention in my soul; and woe

Unto my life; lest happily the rays,

Shed from my babe's sweet life, may playful go

Along my weary path to lift my gaze

From inner self, and place it on the bow

Of thy sweet promise; grant, oh, Lord! it may,

Though now a shadow, prove angelic ray.

"I do not ask thy righteous vengeance, no,

To rest upon the author of my pain;

Mine was a foolish love, and just 's the blow

To my poor heart, for it was silly, vain,

To trust in him, be dazzled by his show

Of truth and virtue; Father, let the stain

Rest on me if thou wilt, but let thy worth

Be with the child to whom I've given birth.

"Father of mercy, grant this one desire:

Be with my babe whatever comes to me;

Within her soul divinest love inspire

And place her feet in paths of purity;

Shield thou her heart from baseness of her sire,

And make her life what ev'ry life should be,

A sweet reflection of thy holy One,

In thee I trust, oh, Lord! thy will be done".

* * * * * * * *

Drop now the curtain, for the tale is told,

I would to God it had been otherwise;

For great's the pain to see in manhood's mold

The likeness of our kind, and yet despise

The very ground he treads on; one who's sold

Himself unto the devil; in whom lies

The will and pow'r to use deceitful wile

The purest of God's creatures to defile.

For such an one the pure will always feel

Supreme contempt, though yet there may be some,

So lost to highest sense of woman's weal,

To the destroyer they would rather come
With words of cheer than to his victim; kneel
For him instead of her; bewail the slum
In which he dragged, forgetting all the while
She was enticed from virtue by his smile.

And here a just distinction should be drawn

Between the one who comes within the pow'r

Of man's designing passion, ere yet the dawn

Of womanhood has broke, and in an hour

Unguarded falls; and her whom now to warn

Is folly; who scorns fair virtue's dower,

And makes a thing for jest of all that's good,

And glories in her fallen womanhood.

To save the Almettas, one need not take

Herself to precincts of revolting slums;

For they, to virtue's worth again awake,

Would hail with joy the light that comes

With woman's sympathy, which for their sake

Had been invoked; theirs is the sin that numbs

The heart, but not aroused is moral sense

When blighting scorn 's their only recompense.





